

March 10, 2008

Public Hearing Testimony RE:

S.B. 613 AAC A Uniform Start Day For Schools

As chair of the Manchester Board of Education, I would like to thank you for your work on the many critical educational issues that face Connecticut students and schools, and your desire to ensure lifetime success for all students.

I read with great interest your press release about instituting a uniform post-Labor Day start date for Connecticut public schools. The natural inclination on the part of the state to try to remedy a hodgepodge of school schedules is quite understandable. However, I believe a uniform start date limits a school district's ability to address two important issues with which state and local leaders should be very concerned: student achievement and school facility improvements.

Manchester is fortunate to have three additional instructional days built into the teacher's contract, resulting in 183 instructional days instead of the standard 180 days. As a District in Need of Improvement, this extra contact time with students is obviously very important to our efforts to boost student achievement across the district. Scheduling these three additional days in conjunction with selecting the start date is a task school districts should be able to handle themselves. Furthermore, the ever-increasing benchmarks of No Child Left Behind may result in Manchester needing to extend the school year to ensure students meet Adequate Yearly Progress. Therefore, it is important for school boards to have the latitude to develop a schedule that best meets the needs of its students and district's improvement goals.

Additionally, Manchester convenes a committee of parents, staff, and administrators to analyze and develop a three-year school calendar. One of the major considerations for the committee is the number of current and future school construction projects and their associated schedules. A uniform start date would severely limit the scheduling flexibility school districts need to complete critical renovation work to ensure our schools meet modern educational needs. School districts must continue to have the option to start school *before* Labor Day in order to dismiss school earlier in June for construction and renovation projects that often have compressed timelines.

On the surface, a post-Labor Day start date might sound appealing, but I feel the concept has been oversimplified. This issue does not need legislative intervention and I hope you will reflect further on the impact your proposal will have on progressive school districts like Manchester. I ask you to please entrust school boards to establish schedules based on locally-driven issues and needs.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me at peg_hackett@cox.net or 647-0508 if you wish to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

Margaret H. Hackett
(D) Chair, Manchester Board of Education